

Core Graduate Attributes

At Universities in Scotland

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Definition

Graduate Attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings developed at university, which include but go beyond the traditional curriculum. (Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell & Watts, 2000)



Background

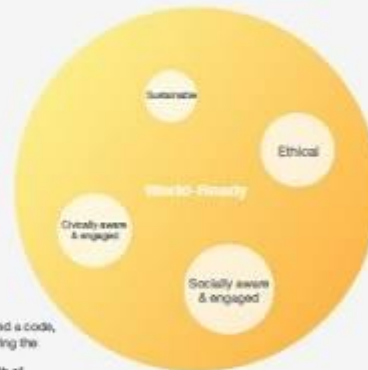
With the emergence of an information society in the late 80's and early 90's came a shift of focus in the industry from technical skills to generic skills (De Waha, 2009). This shift, as well as pressures from employers and organisations, triggered the introduction of graduate attribute (GA) frameworks in universities (Bridgstock, 2009; Capell, 1999). The intended result was to deliver graduates that are better prepared for the workforce.

However, a skills gap is still reported (Banson, Morgan, & Filippakis, 2014) indicating that GA implementation is not fully successful. Effective communication between key stakeholders could be at the root of this problem (Folgy et al., 2000). Given that each university adopted it's own set of graduate attributes, the variety of definitions and ways to categorise and implement GAs could hinder this communication process.

Thus, we set out to find a set of core graduate attributes shared by all universities in the UK, in an attempt to provide all stakeholders with a common language and framework that they can use to talk about GAs.

Method

After collecting the lists of graduate attributes from 11 out of 15 universities in Scotland, a thematic analysis was performed on the resulting dataset.



Each graduate attribute was assigned a code, with similar graduate attributes sharing the same code.

E.g. "Possesses a breadth and depth of knowledge in their specialist area" and "Understand and respect the values, principles, methods and limitations of their discipline(s)." were both coded as Specialists under the Academically Excellent category.

Results

At the moment these results are preliminary. An initial look at the data helped identify 23 subcategories of graduate attributes, grouped into 5 categories.

The circles above are an illustration of these findings, with the size of each circle being proportionate to the number of mentions of that category/graduate attribute in our dataset.

Next steps...

Once the analysis of GAs in Scottish Universities is finished and good inter-rater reliability is established (>0.8), GAs from a matched sample of English Universities as well as all Irish and Welsh Universities will be included in the analysis.

We plan to conduct a similar analysis on a dataset of graduate job adverts in the UK to identify the core attributes that employers are looking for and compare the employer and university perspectives.



Bowden, J., Hart, A., King, J., Trigwell, P., & Watts, G. (2000). Graduate attributes: A review of the literature. Higher Education Research Centre, University of York.